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STATEMENT BY

**MAJOR GENERAL RONALD G. YOUNG
DIRECTOR, MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL
NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU**

BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

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ON

EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR THE TOTAL MILITARY FORCE

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the educational programs available to the National Guard. The National Guard is a balanced force which operates across the full spectrum of military engagement from close order combat to military support to civil authorities, and the Montgomery GI Bill remains a vital part of recruitment and retention of that force. The Montgomery GI Bill—Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606 of 10 U.S.C.) has been a cornerstone of National Guard recruitment and retention and has been greatly expanded by the addition of the Reserve Education Assistance Program (Chapter 1607 of 10 U.S.C.).

The Montgomery GI Bill has been instrumental in building and maintaining our Guard and Reserve forces.

Your committee is currently considering some proposed “Total Force Montgomery GI Bill” concepts which would increase the rate under the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve.

As the Montgomery GI Bill process currently works, Service members must make an irrevocable election choosing which program they want their military service to count towards. This should be an automatic process that is

seamless and transparent to the Service member. For example, the benefit level of Reserve Education Assistance Program rate is determined by the number of months a Service member serves in an active duty status. There is currently one rate for 90 days but less than one year, another rate for one year but less than two years, and a third rate for two years or more.

We at the National Guard Bureau believe that the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education and the Partnership for Veterans Education have identified areas where the Montgomery GI Bill could be enhanced. It may not be necessary to move provisions from Title 10 to Title 38 as proposed. However, we feel it is imperative that if Chapters 1606 and 1607 of 10 U.S.C. are indeed moved to 38 U.S.C. that the provisions in 10 U.S.C. that are unique to the Guard and Reserve be carried forward and maintained. For example, the current Montgomery GI Bill—Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606 of 10 U.S.C.), Reserve Education Assistance Program (Chapter 1607 of 10 U.S.C.), and Reserve Component's "Kicker" benefits for GI Bill allow for reserve component members to receive tuition assistance benefits and GI Bill entitlements, simultaneously, over and above the cost of tuition, if the member is at least a half-time student in accordance with Chapter 1606 Subsection 16131 (b) (1) (D) of 10 U.S.C. (A "kicker" is additional money DoD provides as an incentive to certain troops for service in certain fields.) The intent is for tuition assistance to pay for tuition and Montgomery GI Bill benefits to pay for lodging (living in dorm), subsistence (meal plans), books, travel costs, dependent day care, and other associated

"educational expenses". In contrast, because an Active Duty Service member receives more money, e.g. lodging and subsistence funding, they are not allowed to use both tuition assistance and Montgomery GI Bill benefits over and beyond the cost of the "tuition" or courses. They may only combine the two (tuition assistance and Chapter 30 of 38 U.S.C.) up to the cost of the courses.

Further, the current Montgomery GI Bill allows Guard and Reserve members to receive both an Active Kicker and Reserve Kicker simultaneously, if qualified. Also, Service members have the ability to gain up to 48 months of Montgomery GI Bill benefits in combining any of the three programs. This is the case when a former active component member joins the reserve component (or vice versa) and gains additional months of Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve and/or Kicker benefits. All of these factors are important recruitment tools.

Currently, under 10 U.S.C., reserve components determine which Service members are eligible for reserve component education benefits. It is important that the Services retain this function since they have the best ability to identify those members who are eligible and those who should be suspended or terminated. Reserve components have a vested interest in ensuring their Service members are taken care of, as it affects morale and ultimately retention.

Finally, from a National Guard perspective, it is important that the Montgomery GI Bill and Kicker for reserve component members be maintained as a retention tool to keep members in the reserve component. Under the current Montgomery GI Bill program, (Chapter 1607 of 10 U.S.C.), any eligibility earned while in an active duty status must be used by a member after a release from active duty while still assigned to a Guard or Reserve unit. If the Service member decides to end their reserve service and separates from the Guard or Reserve they lose their entitlement. Under the proposed Total Force Montgomery GI Bill, however, members of the Guard and Reserve who earn eligibility while on an active duty status would be allowed to use that eligibility for 10 years after separation from the Guard or Reserve. This destroys our current incentive and would thus be detrimental to retention. Under current law, both active and reserve component members generally must serve two years or more before they can keep their benefits after being discharged (Chapter 30 of 38 U.S.C.) We do not support changing this.

I thank the Committee for their continued work on this important program and for their continued support of the National Guard.